

THE  TIMES

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STILL
GOT IT
AT 73

At home with Pierce Brosnan

CAITLIN MORAN

How I got my mojo
back and learnt to
be hopeful again

Exclusive extract from
her brilliant new book

A full-length portrait of Pierce Brosnan. He is wearing a dark green pinstripe suit, a white shirt, a dark tie, and a patterned scarf. He is also wearing dark sunglasses and has his right hand raised to his forehead. The background is a solid grey.

‘YOU FEEL THE TICK OF TIME AT 73, BUT I’VE BEEN BLESSED WITH GOOD GENES’

Forever associated with his smooth turns as James Bond and Thomas Crown — as well as some unforgettable singing in *Mamma Mia!* — Pierce Brosnan is relishing a different kind of role, as the ‘psycho’ kingpin in *MobLand*. Helena de Bertodano meets him at home in Malibu

A photograph of Pierce Brosnan and Helen Mirren. Pierce is on the left, wearing a dark blue suit and smiling. Helen is on the right, wearing a light pink dress and smiling. They are standing close together against a grey background.

Pierce Brosnan with his
MobLand co-star Helen Mirren,
81, and, opposite, at the GQ
Men of the Year awards, 2025

Pierce Brosnan is in a fluster. And it is my fault. We are in the palatial living room of his beautiful Malibu home, overlooking the ocean. He has just handed me a crystal glass of water and I am about to put it down but hesitate, concerned that I will damage the polished burlwood table. “Should I use a coaster?” I ask him. He leaps to his feet, putting his own glass directly on the table as he does so. “A coaster,” he says, searching wildly around the room. “There used to be coasters...”

After spinning round a few times, while I implore him not to bother, he sits back down, sinking his head into his hands in mock despair: “I’m so sorry, Helena. You’re a lady from the Cotswolds and you’re stuck here with this kind of born-in-a-barn Irishman who doesn’t even have coasters.”

Of all the ways I can think of describing Brosnan, this is not one of them. Irish, yes, but he looks like he was born in a Savile Row suit. He exudes a cultivated charm that combines good manners (addressing me by name, finding out where I grew up — hence the Cotswolds comment) with self-deprecation. “If he can act, he’s my guy,” Bond producer Cubby Broccoli famously said on first crossing paths with Brosnan, noting not just his good looks but also his easy charisma.

Hailed as “the Cary Grant of the Eighties”, he made his name as the devilishly handsome TV detective Remington Steele; from there it was a natural step to 007. By 2001, he was tagged the Sexiest Man Alive by People magazine. It was an image he leant into, most memorably as the debonair art thief in the remake of *The Thomas Crown Affair*. “I love art and I wanted to steal art,” he explains. He even rocked a suit on the beach in the *Mamma Mia!* films as the dashing Sam Carmichael, a role that brought him a new generation of fans. Now starring as a ruthless mob boss in the TV show *MobLand*, which returns for a second series this month, his look is still suave: think old-money Irish country gentleman, albeit one who happens to run a criminal empire.

Today, while Los Angeles swelters in late-summer heat, he manages to look elegant in a short-sleeved pressed cream shirt and loose-fitting slacks. “I was in something much more creased and shorts, but my wife [Keely Shaye, whom he married 25 years ago] said, ‘Put on a clean shirt,’ so I found this and I hope it’s OK. It looks Ian Fleming-ish.

“I’m a bit of a clothes horse,” he continues. “I like dressing up. I love style and elegance. I recently went to London for a week to do a Burberry commercial: you’ll see me swanning around come

Christmas time in Burberry, looking my natural best.”

He speaks loquaciously in a soft Irish burr, his accent more pronounced than I had expected. Much of what he says is tongue-in-cheek but he is also thoughtful, choosing his words carefully, his sentences rarely trailing off.

His home, set behind ornate teak gates, is like a James Bond fever dream. Vast and opulent, the living room features throne-like chairs in cream and gold, and sofas with plush plum cushions. “Keely did all this,” Brosnan says, waving an arm around. “This kind of French nouveau or whatever it’s called.” Downstairs is a spa and home cinema. Colourful art, including a painting by Damian Elwes, lines the walls, mixed with portraits of the two sons he shares with Keely: Dylan, 29, and Paris, 25.

We sit first on the sofas, at his suggestion, but Brosnan is fidgety. “Let’s sit at the table,” he suggests. “It’s a lovely place to draw.” He brings over a pad of paper and starts sketching as we chat, mostly a series of wiggles and lines. “This works a treat,” he says, much more relaxed. “Here you go,” he says, pulling a page out of his notepad. “This will make you happy: you can put that under your glass.”

There is no faux modesty about his looks, which, even at 73, are still impressive. “I’ve been defined by this visage,” he says. “I have nothing but gratitude for the Celtic alchemy that was bestowed upon me.

“So far, so good. Long may it last. It will creep up on me. You can feel the tick of time at 73. But I’ve been blessed with good genes.”

His visage, as he puts it, was a passport out of a racketsy childhood in Navan near Dublin. He barely knew his father, Tom, a carpenter, who left when his son was two. A couple of years later his mother, May, a nurse, moved to London to work and he was placed first with relatives, then in a boarding house. “It was a solitary childhood. The dream was to be with my mother.” He saw her just once a year and missed her hugely. “Within the passages of longing and separation and goodbyes you create an interior life for yourself.” After an unhappy spell at a Christian Brothers’ school, “later held up as an example of abuse to children”, he moved to England, aged 11, to join his mother and her new husband, “a sweet, kind man”. He attended a Putney comprehensive: “I was as green as the grass. They nicknamed me ‘Irish’; I wore that as a badge of identity.” Now 94, his mother lives in Wimbledon, “in a house I bought in another life”. They remain very close. “I will see her this weekend.”

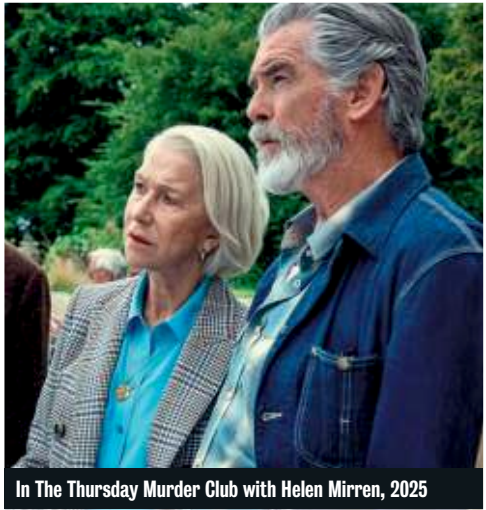
Leaving school at 16 with two CSEs in art and English, he found work as a commercial artist before training as an actor at the Drama Centre London. “I knew I had something: talent and a



At the 2020 Golden Globes with wife Keely and sons Dylan and Paris. Below: as 007 with Halle Berry in *Die Another Day*, 2002



With his late first wife, Cassandra Harris, circa 1990



In *The Thursday Murder Club* with Helen Mirren, 2025

‘IT’S SO DELIGHTFUL TO SEE MYSELF AS THIS GNARLY, CRAZY, DESPERATE MAN’

certain look that worked on film. And I had an inner life and strength of character to be able to traverse those waters, should I get what I wanted.”

What he wanted was to be a famous actor. His quiet confidence and good looks soon earned him stage roles and brief appearances in films such as *The Long Good Friday* (1980). By then he had met his first wife, the actress Cassandra Harris, who appeared as a Bond girl in *For Your Eyes Only*. Nearly five years older than him, she had two young children. “Not having had a family or been part of a family, I could understand my desire and my comfort within that lifestyle ... Being fatherless and then being a father is quite a task at times, but I enjoy it. I’ve been a father all my [adult] life.”

They had a son together, Sean, now 42. Harris came up with the idea of moving to Los Angeles, remortgaging their house in Wimbledon to do so. The move was the making of Brosnan, who quickly secured the title role in *Remington Steele*. “It was Cassie who gave me the strength to come to America,” he says. “She was so bold.”

Her death from ovarian cancer, aged 43, left him a widower at just 38. His stepdaughter, Charlotte, would later die of the same disease. “It took a while to heal,” he says quietly. “They are still in my soul, in my heart. I talk to them.”

The difficulties of his life — his tough childhood and what he describes as “the sorrow of loves that have passed” — give Brosnan a hinterland that serves him well as an actor, especially in recent years, where he has branched out into character roles. He brought real poignancy to his interpretation of the boxing trainer Brendan Ingle in *Giant* (2025), almost unrecognisable with his prosthetic broken nose and bald cap. Then he appeared bearded, even — unthinkable — sartorially challenged, as former trade union leader Ron in *The Thursday Murder Club* (2025); in *The Last Rifleman* (2023), he starred as a 92-year-old Second World War veteran. “I’ve broken the chalice of myself, as it were,” he says, sounding relieved to finally earn roles that do not hinge principally on his looks. “I’m now playing the older man, the wiser man.” He has just returned from Australia, where he was shooting *Extraction 3* with Chris Hemsworth, playing his father.

And now, in *MobLand*, he stars as the terrifying Irish kingpin Conrad Harrigan — or, as his character puts it, “I’m Conrad the dread 100 f***ing guns Harrigan.” The first series ends with him in prison, goading his enemies to “bring it on”. In the second series, he becomes

increasingly unhinged. “Stark staring bonkers berserk,” as one character puts it.

Brosnan chuckles. “Last night, we watched episodes 1-4 [of series 2] with the boys and their girlfriends. Keely was holding my hand. And then [he pauses for effect] she unheld my hand.”

Unlike Bond or Thomas Crown, where he played a version of himself, now he really has to prove his mettle as an actor. “It’s so delightful to see myself as this gnarly, mangled, lost, crazy, desperate man.”

Could he relate to anything in the character? He laughs incredulously. “I have nothing in common with this psycho. I had to jump off a cliff with it. [But] I think definitely we are all capable of doing something that is outwardly not a good thing to do.”

What’s the worst thing he’s ever done? “What the heck?” he splutters, but plays along. “I can bend the truth. Exaggerate.”

Hmm, hardly Conrad-worthy. Has he ever had a prima donna moment: flounced off set, perhaps? “No, I don’t believe in that shit. I mean, it can be frustrating at times. Certain people can really just bend your patience ... If I really let it go, then Conrad is pretty close: you’ll feel it. I bite my tongue, go away and have a cup of tea and a McVitie’s ...”

In a family context too he says he can occasionally lose his rag. “I can bark. But I’m not very good with arguments. I’m always the first to apologise. I hate [a bad] atmosphere.”

Conrad’s only redeeming feature, Brosnan says, is “his love of Maeve”, played by Helen Mirren, who, if anything, is more savage than him. “He knows he’s being manipulated by her. And he allows it. I look at her and I just think, ‘You wicked woman!’”

We ponder whether there are shades of Donald Trump in Conrad. Brosnan thinks not. “It’s more Jacobean tragedy, Shakespearean, the king in his domain. It’s quite hilarious, a medieval humour — barbaric and chaotic.”

Not that he is a fan of Trump. “He has the bit between his teeth ... I love America. And it saddens me what is happening to this great nation and the repercussions for my children and grandchildren.”

He felt more hopeful during the Biden years. “It wasn’t as dark. There’s a heaviness now to society, culture and the restrictions that have been put on us — creatively, philosophically, spiritually, emotionally.”

He is equally withering about Gavin Newsom, the California governor and possible presidential candidate. “He’s a slippery kind of fellow.” ➔

Indeed, the only topic he shows some reluctance to discuss is James Bond. He has not watched his Bond films since their release, not even with his sons.

"I have no desire to see myself in Bond. I'm just a member of the audience now awaiting the next Bond and wishing him well. There are lots of good hats in the ring. Lots of great actors. I see it. I follow it. They could probably just go left-field and pick someone that none of us know about."

For example? He backs off fast.

"I wouldn't pick anyone. My wife told me not to say anything and I've said too much. Because once I say something it goes [everywhere] and I get hanged."

He is more relaxed talking about the new *Thomas Crown Affair* with Michael B Jordan, due for release in March. "He's a stellar actor. He reached out to me to join him in some scene at an airport with fancy planes. I would have done it but the schedule didn't permit it. I think it's one of those roles that should be passed on, like playing Hamlet."

Likewise with *Mamma Mia!*, a role he would happily reprise. "I think we all would love to do another *Mamma Mia!*. I think Meryl would. Colin. Everyone. It's definitely the gift that keeps giving. A new audience. A little button of a child gave me a high-five the other day. Her grandmother said she loved me as Sam Carmichael. I said, 'Shall I start singing?'"

Well aware that his singing was mocked in some quarters, he takes it in good part. "In James Bond, I was jumping off cliffs and hanging on wires and going through fire. But the singing was the most terrifying thing I've ever done. The only thing that comforted me was to see Colin Firth and Stellan Skarsgård in equal terror."

His career may look effortless, but he says he has experienced fallow periods. "There have been doldrums. I have this beautiful house in Malibu. I have to pay the mortgage. There are school fees. There are definite moments of, oh, this boat is not quite sinking, but [it might] if we don't get a job soon."

So he has taken on the occasional turkey. "Not many. But you make peace with that. You make the commitment because you need the money, then you show up on time and do good work."

When not working, he divides his time between Malibu and Kauai, where he has a second home, "a little three-bedroom cottage at the end of the road. We have our own chickens and I have a yurt, where I paint." He starts mocking himself: "I have a yurt in Africa," he says, impersonating Meryl Streep.

They are thinking of selling their Malibu home. "We've been spared by the fires a few times now. But I think it's time to move. Everything changes; everything falls apart." He gestures towards the ocean, serenely twinkling in front of us. "We live

'I WOULD LOVE TO DO ANOTHER MAMMA MIA! — IT'S THE GIFT THAT KEEPS GIVING'



As Conrad Harrigan in the new series of *MobLand*

by this body of earth's water on a fault in a ring of earthquakes. That creates a fear."

His life, he says, is not especially glamorous. "I think the two of us are somewhat reclusive. It's a long way into town. We have a small circle of friends here [but] people get divorced, they die, they move on. And we're still here."

He waxes lyrical about Keely, "a powerhouse of a woman". They met at a charity event in Mexico in 1994, where she was working as a journalist. "I was with my son Sean, who was nine. I'd been in my widowhood for a number of years, bumping into the furniture here and there, trying to figure life out."

They coincided early one morning at the swimming pool. "My son was playing with his He-Man toy and this lovely lady walked around the corner. I looked over my shoulder and looked again." He jokes about trying to keep his attention on his son: "That's very good, son. Mind yourself; don't slip." Then suddenly she was in front of him. "She put out her hand and said, 'Hi, I'm Keely.' And I said, 'Hello, I'm Pierce.' That was it. That night we madly sat up until about three in the morning." The next morning they had breakfast together by the sea. "Big waves. She said, 'I'm going to go for a swim.' I said, 'I'm OK.' She walked away in her lovely bikini. And Sean said, 'You're so chicken, Dad.' 'Just be quiet, I'm going to go for a swim.' So I went out and the waves are beating me down and I'm trying to get above the waves, trying to look cool. And she said, 'Go under the wave.' I finally [reached her] and she was topless and [I thought], 'My God!'"

He says that he's still scared of the sea. "I'm like an Irish-Jewish grandmother. I go into the water but I don't go into the waves."

Now, 32 years on, they are seen as one of the most solid couples in Hollywood. "We like each other, challenge each other." Do they argue? "We bicker. The biggest thing is [that] I bring sand into the house.

I quickly get the broom and sweep it all out and say, 'Hello. Cup of tea? It wasn't me, it was him ...'" He nods towards his son Dylan who, as we speak, is crossing the beach in front of the window.

He insists he likes to pull his weight around the house. "I take out the trash. I empty the dishwasher. I do the laundry. I let Keely do the cooking. She is a great cook. I'm a one-trick-pony kind of guy."

What is his one trick? "Coconut fish. I do it in breadcrumbs."

He makes a conscious effort to eat well and keep fit. "Keely keeps me on track. I walk away from some of the great stuff in life: the cocktails or the beer. I stay away from the bread and the butter and the pasta. And I exercise: I walk the beach, go swimming, ride the bike, play tennis."

Apart from anything else, he says, he still wants to be considered as a romantic lead. "I'd like to have a crack at one more love story. I'd like to take the Thomas Crown and James Bond characters, that persona I've created for myself, and find another role like that, maybe as a private detective. I love romance." Who would he choose as a co-star? "Oh, heavens. There are so many. Jessica Chastain comes to mind. She's a brilliant, beautiful actress, so smart, bright, alive."

A third season of *MobLand* is also in the works. "I'm wondering how long I stay alive [as Conrad]. I've seen a few people disappear. Should I be calling up my agents and looking for employment?"

We walk outside to his art studio, which he has set up in the garage. It displaces his black BMW, which sits in the driveway. An electrical fire destroyed the iconic Aston Martin V12 Vanquish that was a trophy from his final Bond film, *Die Another Day* (2002). "We came home from a meditation session one night and flames were leaping out of the garage."

His studio is full of bright canvases, including a very familiar-looking painting by the door. It is a copy of Paul Gauguin's *Red Dog*. "Someone said you should think about painting an artist that you love. This painting is actually in the living room, and it's one of the reproductions from *The Thomas Crown Affair*, of which we have a few. I love this painting so I thought I'd have a crack at it. The thing is, it's just taken me for ever to paint."

It doesn't really occur to me until later quite how meta this is: a fake of a fake sitting in Pierce Brosnan's driveway. Life imitating art imitating art. Thomas Crown would be proud of him. ■

Series two of *MobLand* begins on Paramount+ on September 18